

**Testimony of
The Honorable John Marshall
Virginia's Secretary of Public Safety
Before The
Committee on Government Reform**

October 3, 2003

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. I am John Marshall and I serve in the Cabinet of Governor Mark Warner as Virginia's Secretary of Public Safety. I work in close collaboration with our Office of Commonwealth Preparedness and maintain oversight of 11 public safety agencies, including the State Police, National Guard and Emergency Management. Our Virginia Department of Emergency Management continues to coordinate overall statewide response and recovery activities related to Hurricane Isabel between federal, state and local authorities as well as citizens.

The impact of Hurricane Isabel continues to be felt across the Commonwealth. Today, two weeks after the storm, efforts continue to ensure the full restoration of power and telephone service and to promote a secure, safe and sanitary environment. At the height of the disaster nearly 2 million customers were without power, mainly in Eastern, Central and Northern Virginia. Individuals and communities are confronted with the monumental task of cleaning up debris and repairing and rebuilding homes, businesses and public facilities. More than 6.3 million pounds of ice and 1.4 million gallons of water have been distributed by state and federal agencies and that is on top of resources secured directly by localities. There remains a long process to restore a sense of normalcy to affected individuals and communities.

Hurricane Isabel entered Virginia September 18 after making landfall along the North Carolina Outer Banks. The Commonwealth experienced sustained winds near 100 mph and tropical storm force winds for 29 hours. The hurricane produced storm surge of 5 to 8 feet along the coast and in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Rainfall totals ranged between 2 and 11 inches along its track, including in the National Capital Region. Damages due to wind, rain, and storm surge resulted in flooding, electrical outages, debris, damaged homes and businesses, and interruption of transportation and other routine daily activities.

At the height of the incident approximately 18,618 residents were housed in 158 shelters. Local officials report that more than 32,000 Virginians were evacuated from their homes, and curfews were imposed in many jurisdictions. Ninety-nine of the Commonwealth's 134 cities and counties declared local emergencies. Tragically, 28 people died in the Commonwealth as a result of Hurricane Isabel, with the majority of deaths occurring in the days after the storm had cleared the state.

Further damages occurred when a series of thunderstorms and tornados came through parts of the already impacted areas on September 23.

Governor Warner took a proactive approach to the impending hurricane by declaring a State of Emergency in the Commonwealth on September 15, 2003, three days prior to the expected arrival of the storm. In addition, on September 17, over 24 hours in advance of the storm, the Governor authorized mandatory evacuation of designated coastal jurisdictions in low-lying areas. These actions may have saved hundreds of lives.

Governor Warner requested an Expedited Major Presidential Disaster Declaration (FEMA-1491-DR-VA) that was granted to Virginia on September 18, 2003. (See Attachment 1 for disaster assistance designations). Local officials report that more than 8,000 homes and nearly 300 businesses suffered major damage or were destroyed, coupled with an estimated \$31 million in agricultural damage. Assessment efforts continue.

Hurricane Isabel's assault on Virginia has left an indelible mark on the landscape and in the minds of our citizens. While the task of assessing both our readiness and performance at the local, state and federal levels as well as within the private sector is so important, at the present time Governor Warner and his administration remain focused and committed to ensuring that all that can be done is being done to address the needs of our citizens in the aftermath of this event.

The Committee has asked that we address four primary questions.

1. What procedures are in-place to retrospectively assess the situation and how decisions were made?

Governor Warner has already indicated that he will conduct a complete review of how the Commonwealth performed in response to the largest disaster in a generation. Given the scope and magnitude of the event and the necessity for close collaboration with impacted local communities and voluntary relief organizations, this will be a complex undertaking. We must gather and analyze large volumes of data in a coordinated fashion to uncover lessons learned. More importantly, where necessary, those lessons learned need to be translated into measurable actions to improve our collective preparedness for the next event. We are committed to this review.

Having said this, there have been a number of lessons that have already been gleaned. Clearly, as I have mentioned, the Governor's proactive approach was the right one. The early action by local and state officials to warn the public about the impending impact of Hurricane Isabel allowed Virginians the time to prepare. Here in the National Capital Region, like other areas of Virginia, many citizens heeded the early calls to make storm preparations by stocking up on water, non-perishable food and other necessities. However, as Virginia has avoided direct landfall or major inland impacts in all but a few instances in the last several decades, we must honestly acknowledge that many citizens did not adequately prepare. With the largest power outage in Virginia history, and its

resulting impact on clean and safe drinking water supplies, it is safe to say that not every citizen was as prepared as he or she could be. That being said,--local officials were diligent in their efforts to warn residents in low-lying areas about the potential for flooding, and they readied their emergency response assets in a coordinated fashion.

The most notable success was that a series of conference calls was conducted in advance of the storm to coordinate actions about the closing of government offices, businesses, schools and the federal workforce as well as overall storm preparations. While some may question the timing of actions, I believe the more important message is that key decision makers across the National Capital Region acted in unison to make definitive decisions with the best information available. An added element for this event is that the Governor conducted these calls also with local elected officials, who were appearing in the news media, so that our preparedness messages were consistent.

We must keep in mind, though, that the challenge with any weather event is the unpredictability of what will actually occur in relation to a forecast and what problems will actually be generated as a result of a storm.

2. What implications are there for regional preparedness as a whole?

Clearly, an assessment of our critical infrastructures – water, power, telecommunications, and transportation is essential to understanding our vulnerabilities. In this case it was Mother Nature who provided the impetus. We recognize in the post September 11th environment that it could have been terrorists. We are in the process, across the National Capital Region, of assessing our critical infrastructures and their interdependency on other systems. This need was evident with the widespread power disruption that had a corresponding effect on drinking water systems, and perishable food supplies.

As we all know, resources are not limitless. At the state level, we have already identified the need to refine the resource request and allocation processes during the emergency event to reduce the level of “additional data” requirements placed on local managers and shorten the timeline for delivery of resources

3. How were residents and businesses kept informed before, during and after the hurricane?

It is clear that citizens and businesses appropriately expect safety and security information during a crisis. Overall, the media did an outstanding job of reporting on the approach of the storm and helping those of us in state and local government to get important information and guidance out to our citizens, and we are indebted to them for this valuable service. This is not to say, though, that information flow was flawless. After the storm, the accuracy of information and information flow between private utility companies and the public was an ongoing source of concern. As part of our assessment we will evaluate how we performed, and work with our partners in the National Capital Region to capture and institutionalize successes and improve where needed on information flow. Consideration of additional methods for reaching out to citizens must

take place to enhance our alerting capabilities. Given the scope and complexity of this disaster, overall, we think information dissemination was good.

4. How can the region better prepare to respond in the future?

As is always the case in an event of this magnitude, the level of success achieved in overall preparation, response, recovery and mitigation is directly linked to effective communication and coordination. Since the events of September 11th, we have witnessed improved coordination and cooperation in the National Capital Region. The Washington D.C. Council of Governments has staffed and supported planning efforts among local, state, federal and private organizations. The Department of Homeland Security has established the Office of National Capital Region Coordination to assist with coordination. Governor Warner along with his counterparts, Governor Erlich and Mayor Williams, meet regularly and among the issues they discuss are emergency preparedness. State and District staff, through the Senior Policy Group, talk weekly via a conference call, and meet on a monthly basis.

Continuous improvement with National Capital Region preparedness will be driven by two major factors. First, we must assess how well we did or did not perform at all levels of government, within the private sector and among our citizens. We must capture and build on our successes as well as identify and address any shortcomings.

Second, we need to sustain our momentum and tempo. We must recognize that the work undertaken prior to the events of September 11th and subsequently is resulting in progress. Our collective responses to the problems caused by Hurricane Isabel have provided a real world test of these efforts. This storm confirmed that many of the vulnerabilities we had identified post 9/11 do in fact deserve ongoing attention. It is reasonable to assume that we will identify shortcomings with our response and recovery actions. We need to view any shortcomings identified in the appropriate context. They may reflect the need to provide additional training to individuals or agencies, enhance plans and procedures or improve technology.

The identification of problems should not be construed to suggest that the National Capital Region is not making significant improvements in its preparedness. This was a large and complex weather event that resulted in unprecedented problems across 2/3 of Virginia and the entire National Capital Region. Sustaining focus, commitment and funding is the key to better preparedness for future events. We need not react and reorganize. Rather we must rededicate our commitment to continuing enhancements to preparedness in the National Capital Region

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today and I am happy to answer questions.

Attachment 1 – Designated Counties Table

Declaration Date: 09/18/2003				Incident Period: 09/18/2003 & Continuing					
NUMBER OF COUNTIES, INDEPENDENT CITIES & TRIBAL AREAS DESIGNATED									
Indiv. Assist	99	Pub Assist	99	Tribal Nations			0		
DECLARATION INFORMATION									
Jurisdiction	AFFECTED Not FEMA Designated	Declaration Dates							
		IA	Public Assistance						
			A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Accomack		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Albemarle		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Amelia		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Amherst		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Appomattox		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Arlington		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Augusta		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Bedford		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Brunswick		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Buckingham		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Campbell		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Caroline		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Charlotte		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Chesterfield		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Charles City		09/18	09/18	09/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
Clarke		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Culpeper		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Cumberland		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Dinwiddie		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Essex		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Fairfax		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Fauquier		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Fluvanna		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Frederick		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Gloucester		09/18	09/18	09/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
Goochland		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Greene		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Greensville		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Halifax		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Hanover		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Henrico		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Isle of Wight		09/18	09/18	09/18					
James City		09/18	09/18	09/18					
King and Queen		09/22	09/22	09/22					
King George		09/22	09/22	09/22					
King William		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Lancaster		09/18	09/18	09/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
Louisa		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Loudoun		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Lunenburg		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Madison		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Mathews		09/18	09/18	09/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
Mecklenburg		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Middlesex		09/18	09/18	09/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24

Nelson		09/22	09/22	09/22					
New Kent		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Northampton		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Northumberland		09/18	09/18	09/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
Nottoway		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Orange		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Page		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Pittsylvania		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Powhatan		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Prince Edward		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Prince George		09/18	09/18	09/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
Prince William		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Rappahannock		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Richmond		09/18	09/18	09/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
Rockbridge		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Rockingham		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Shenandoah		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Southampton		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Spotsylvania		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Stafford		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Surry		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Sussex		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Warren		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Westmoreland		09/18	09/18	09/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
York		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Alexandria – Independent City		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Bedford – Independent City		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Buena Vista – Independent City		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Charlottesville – Independent City		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Chesapeake – Independent City		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Colonial Heights – Independent City		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Danville – Independent City		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Emporia – independent City		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Fairfax – Independent City		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Falls Church – Independent City		09/20	09/20	09/20					
Franklin – Independent City		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Fredericksburg – Independent City		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Hampton – Independent City		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Harrisonburg – Independent City		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Hopewell – Independent City		09/18	09/18	09/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
Lynchburg – Independent City		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Manassas – Independent City		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Manassas Park – Independent City		09/22	09/22	09/22					
Newport News – Independent City		09/18	09/18	09/18					
Norfolk – Independent City		9/18	9/18	9/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
Petersburg – Independent City		9/20	9/20	9/20					
Poquoson – Independent City		9/18	9/18	9/18					
Portsmouth – Independent City		9/18	9/18	9/18					
Richmond – independent City		9/20	9/20	9/20					
Staunton – Independent City		9/20	9/20	9/20					
Suffolk – Independent City		9/18	9/18	9/18					
Virginia Beach – Independent City		9/18	9/18	9/18	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24	9/24
Waynesboro – Independent City		9/20	9/20	9/20					
Williamsburg – Independent City		9/18	9/18	9/18					
Winchester – Independent City		09/22	09/22	09/22					

CATEGORY KEY

- A: Debris removal
- B: Emergency protective measures
- C: Road systems and bridges
- D: Water control facilities
- E: Public buildings and contents
- F: Public utilities
- G: Parks, recreational and other